

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

New Designation ☒
Amendment of a previous designation ☐
Please summarize any amendment(s) _____

Property name WESTERN BUS GARAGE
If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.

Address 5330 WISCONSIN AVENUE NW (Facing 4th STREET NW)

Square and lot number(s) 1657 1024

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3E

Date of construction 1934 Date of major alteration(s) _____

Architect(s) ARTHUR B. NORTON, JR. Architectural style(s) Stripped Classical

Original use BUS GARAGE Present use BUS GARAGE

Property owner Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

Legal address of property owner 600 5th STREET NW

NAME OF APPLICANT(S) TENLEYTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.

Address/Telephone of applicant(s) 5332 4th STREET, NW
202/686-1446 Washington, DC 20015

Name and title of authorized representative J. C. Waldmann

Signature of representative J. C. Waldmann Date 11/8/2005

Name and telephone of author of application J C Waldmann

06-03 Date received 11/9/2005
H.P.O. staff [Signature]

GENERAL STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Western Bus Garage, facing 44th Street, NW, between Harrison and Jenifer Streets, NW, and described in the DC Real Property Assessment Database as lot 24, square 1657, 5230 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, qualifies for designation as a historic landmark and should be listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites.

The street railways, and later busses, have been integral to the growth of the District of Columbia. The Wisconsin Avenue corridor from Georgetown to the District line at Western Avenue was served by the Georgetown and Tennallytown Railway Company of the District of Columbia, chartered in 1888, and its successors continue to provide transportation service along the corridor.

In the first decade of the 20th century a car barn, facing Wisconsin Avenue, was erected on the square on which the Western Bus Garage is located. That car barn and the Western Bus Garage together occupied the site until street cars were totally replaced by buses. The area at the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and Western Avenue has been a center of transportation infrastructure for over a century.

The Western Bus Garage meets criteria for designation in the D.C. Inventory (section 201.1 (b), (d) and (f), 201.2 and 201.3.) It is the site of transportation activities that contributed significantly to the development of the District of Columbia. It is associated with patterns of growth and change that resulted in significant development of the residential areas along the routes served by the busses, and it is the work of an architect of recognized achievement. Western Bus Garage retains sufficient original integrity to convey and represent the values and qualities for which it is deemed significant. Sufficient time has passed since construction in the 1930s to allow professional evaluation of Western Bus Garage in its historical context.

It also meets criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: its association with the growth of public transportation has contributed significantly to the transition from rural/agricultural land use to the development of suburban neighborhoods, and it is an example of the work of a master architect.

Historical Background

The history of street railway and bus lines in the District of Columbia is extensively documented in the multi-property nomination *Historic Streetcar and Bus Resources of Washington, D.C., 1862-1962*, prepared by Traceries in 1998. The Washington and Georgetown Railway Company was formed in 1862 in response to the sizable increase in the population of Washington and an accompanying need for better transportation engendered by the Civil War. The Georgetown and Tennallytown Railway Company of the District of Columbia, which traversed an established transportation corridor along what is now Wisconsin Avenue, was chartered in 1888. As the streetcar lines proliferated, new buildings were designed and built to house and service the cars. In the first decade of the 20th century, a car barn was built on Wisconsin Avenue on the eastern side of the square where the Western Bus Garage would be built some twenty years later. Pictures show this early car barn with tracks going south on Wisconsin Avenue. Later, streetcars utilized a turnaround at Wisconsin Circle just across the D.C. line in Maryland.

Oil and gasoline powered buses were introduced in 1897 and again in 1909, but in both instances the ventures failed. In 1921 Washington Rapid Transit, and independent bus company was established. While initially bus routes provided extensions to the streetcar lines, by the 1920s consolidation rather than expansion of routes was taking place and buses were increasingly viewed as the solution to the city's traffic problems! Certainly the buses could maneuver around obstacles and accidents - something the streetcars could not do. As the transition from streetcar to bus progressed, streetcar barns were converted to bus use and, ultimately, garages specifically built for buses were introduced. The new bus garages were viewed as important public buildings, and as a result, Capital Transit Company, successor to earlier street railway companies, engaged Arthur Heaton to design the two known extant bus garages, Western Bus Garage and the Capital Transit Bus Garage at 32 M Street, SE. The builder of the Western Bus Garage, Samuel J. Prescott & Co., Inc., is also listed as the builder of the 1908 car barn erected on the same square. By the mid-1950s buses were becoming the dominant form of public transportation. A five week transit strike in 1955 was the catalyst for the conversion to buses only. A law, enacted by Congress, allowing D.C. Commissioners to settle the strike, also revoked the current franchise as of August 14, 1956, and required that a new operator operate an all bus system. The charter of the new franchisee, D.C. Transit, required elimination of streetcars by 1963. On January 28, 1962, one hundred years after their introduction in 1862, the streetcars made their last runs. By the mid-1960s the street car barn on Wisconsin Avenue had been demolished and the site was given over totally to buses.

Architect

Arthur Berthrong Heaton, Jr., was born in 1875 and attended Washington, DC elementary schools and Central High School. At the age of 19 he began his career in architecture as an apprentice in the office of Frederic B. Pyle. The next year he worked with Paul Pelz, for the next several years, 1896-1899 worked for William J. Marsh and the firm, Marsh & Peter. In 1900, he opened his own office. His American Institute of Architects application, dated 8/13/1901, listed three examples of his work, all utilizing brick and stone; The Augusta Apartments, 2 houses for John Joy Edson, Jr. on Calvert Street, NW, and an apartment for C. H. Weaver. Shortly afterwards, 1903-4, Heaton spent a year studying at the Sorbonne in Paris and made a study of cathedrals in England, France and Italy.

For about fourteen years early in his career beginning in 1908, he served as the supervising architect for Washington Cathedral during the initial period of its construction. At the same time he maintained his own architectural practice.

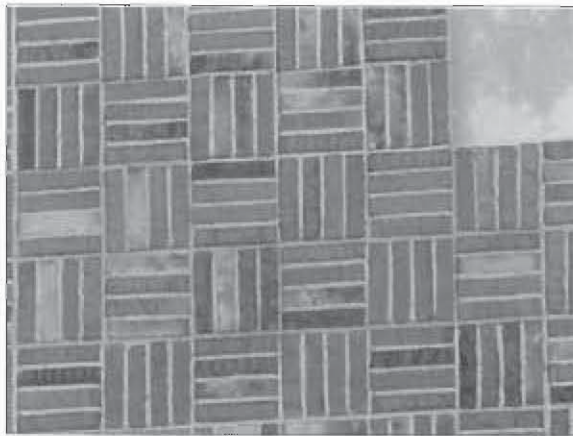
A prolific architect, Heaton's work is also remarkably varied, including private homes, commercial, educational (Stockton and Corcoran Halls at George Washington University with Albert L. Harris), and transportation facilities. Kathleen Wood in written testimony of 12/3/1985 prepared (but noted "not given") for the Park & Shop says Arthur Heaton paid attention to a building's proposed function in creating its design, a response to the established Beaux Arts function of the period. "He was thinking about what would be necessary to house buses structurally and at the same time grappling with how to give the building a dignified expression of its own on the exterior, expressive of its time and function..." Wood goes on, "During his career, Heaton devoted special attention to designing structures catering to transportation vehicles and their operators - from ... bus garage ... to gas stations; he designed Washington's first multistory parking garage..." The latter structure, since demolished, was ornamented by an automobile motif of Heaton's own design.

Arthur Heaton was a transportation enthusiast. He was one of Washington's first automobile owners. His first driver's license was a "steam engineer's license." At the time, 1901, he owned a steam engine Locomobile with a canopy top.

Active in his profession, he was a leader in the "Renovize Washington," a movement organized during the Depression to repair homes in DC slums, while providing employment to workers in the building industry. He also helped to organize the Building Congress to advance the welfare of the entire building industry, architects, engineers, contractors, labor and financial interests. A proponent of excellent craftsmanship, his own work pays close attention to detail. The architectural drawings for the Western Bus Garage evidence a skilled hand.

In 1935, he served as President of the District Chapter of the American Institute of Architects which in 1942 awarded him a fellowship noting his contribution to the advancement of the profession. Significant projects include the Park & Shop Shopping Center in Cleveland Park, the National Geographic Building on 16th Street, NW, 500 houses in the Burleith subdivision for Shannon & Luchs, the Methodist Home of the Aged and Washington Loan & Trust Building at 17th and G Streets, now demolished but for which he received an awarded of architectural merit from the Washington Board of Trade in 1927.

Heaton was a lover of colonial architecture, an admirer of Thomas Jefferson, and made frequent trips to Williamsburg, Charlottesville and Fredericksburg, VA for fresh ideas and inspiration. He was particularly interested in the slight variations in moldings, bricks and details of old buildings. The Western Bus Garage reflects his interest in brickwork.



Brick work above doorways, west facade



Sample brick work

Throughout his career, Arthur B. Heaton, Jr. worked tirelessly to improve the quality of Washington architecture. He was active practitioner of his profession until his death in 1951.

Description



The Western Bus Garage is a large storage and service facility located on an approximately 3 3/4 acre site on the east side of 44th Street, NW, between Harrison and Jenifer streets. The service garage fronts directly onto 44th Street at about mid-block, facing the Lord & Taylor department store parking lot opposite. To the north of the garage is a large open-air bus storage lot surrounded by a brick perimeter wall along 44th

and Jenifer streets. Within this area are several more recent ancillary service buildings. The storage lot continues on the east side of the garage to the Wisconsin Avenue building line, where there is another brick perimeter wall, running between the Friendship Heights Metrorail station entrance at the north end and an automobile dealership at the south end. An alley runs along the southern edge of the property, intersecting 44th Street at the southwest corner of the garage. On the opposite side of this alley is a long row of two-story walk-up apartments facing onto Harrison Street.

The garage is a sprawling horizontal structure of reinforced concrete, steel, and brick. It is laid out as a trapezoid in plan, aligning with the original property lines that ran perpendicular to Wisconsin Avenue. The 44th Street (west) side measures 233 feet, the north side 148 feet, the east side 216 feet, and the south side 235 feet. The open-plan building is made up of three structural components: a central storage shed that runs the entire length of the building, flanked by secondary side blocks. The shed is supported on concrete columns, with long-span steel trusses and a continuous monitor roof; the flanking sections are concrete-framed with flat roofs. The central trusses span about 95 feet, supporting a roof ridge about 42 feet above the main service floor. From the exterior, the shallow-pitched steps of the central monitor roof give the garage its distinctive massing.

The central shed is aligned parallel to Wisconsin Avenue so that it runs diagonal to the main 44th Street building façade. The one-story flat-roofed section between the shed and 44th Street is triangular in plan and contains the main bus entrances, wash rack area, and various service rooms (according to the original building plans, these were originally used as the tire room and garage office on the north end and the garagemen's lockers, toilets, and supply room on the south end). On the rear side of the shed, the two-story flat-roofed section contains other service and support spaces. According to the original plans, these included a boiler/incinerator room, coal bin, oil storage room, and service pits at the basement level; five service bays, a rear bus entrance, switchboard room, and "colored men's" toilet and locker on the ground floor; and a superintendent's office, cashier's office, cash and fare box room, operators' and trainmen's room, locker room, and toilets on the second floor. A large light shaft on the second floor opens to the service bays below.

The main 44th Street façade is given a monumental treatment in tapestry brick and limestone, using modernistic motifs of the 1930s Art Deco/Art Moderne period. The façade is a symmetrical tripartite composition, with the dominant central element made up of three rectangular bus entrance bays separated by piers and flanked by small pavilions called “pylons” on the architect’s original drawing. Each pylon measures 27’6” high and has a large window panel of multi-light industrial steel sash set under a recessed brick panel. Between the pylons, the three bus entrance doors are inset at an angle, leaving a covered triangular apron with space for either a pedestrian door or window in the angled return. Soffits in this triangular area are paneled sheet copper painted white. The left-hand bus entry has been bricked in.

Above the entrances are brick spandrels defined by top and bottom soldier courses and a slightly projecting sill, above which are large flat wall surfaces of basketweave brick surrounding limestone inscription panels. Bronze letters attached to the limestone originally read “Capital Traction Company,” with one word over each entrance. These have been replaced with a modern flat panel sign above the center entry reading “Western Division” with the Metro logo.

The central door-and-ylon element is flanked by slightly lower blocks (about 22’8” high), each composed of three window bays delineated by pilasters, and terminating in a solid pier at the outer corner. The windows are identical to those in the pylons, arranged in paired panels, with each panel divided into three lights wide by five high. Some sections are hinged for ventilation. The two extreme right-hand window openings on the facade have been bricked in.

Though modernistic, the stylistic expression of the facade is in the restrained and almost classical manner typical of the New Deal era national capital. The sense of an architectural style is derived not from ornamental appliqué, but from subtle modeling of the facade and the polychrome texture of the brick. The surfaces of the water table, pilasters, entablature, and parapets is recessed about four inches in succession as the building rises, in the manner of the stepped setbacks that typified tall buildings of the period. A slightly angled capstone on top of the central piers lends a slight geometric effect, as do simple vertical recesses hanging below the “capitals” of the piers.

From a short distance the facade appears to be a light golden brown overall. At closer range, the face brick is a richly variegated palette of hard-fired gold, red, olive, and plum bricks with textured surfaces. The brick is mostly laid in a plain running bond, but subtle variations of color and pattern emphasize architectural details. There is a molded brick course capping the water table, and brick sills made of dark headers. In the basketweave area above the three main doors, the bricks are slightly larger and their overall color is a slightly more uniform reddish hue. Just below the entablature on the two side wings, two courses of headers alternating in color and recess simulate a band of dentils. In contrast to the remainder of the all-brick elevation, smooth ashlar limestone is used for the pier capitals, entablatures and parapets.

The architect’s plans dated October 1, 1934 indicate that the original facade design was modified slightly in revisions dated November 16, 1934, probably as a cost-saving measure. The pylons were first envisioned to have pyramidal tile roofs, which would have given them more of a three-dimensional quality. The original design also showed concave copper awnings above the bus entrances.

The rear or east elevation of the building is faced in common red brick with large evenly-spaced panels of multi-light steel windows with a mixture of clear and obscure wire glass. The window panels are relatively uniform in configuration but there is some variation, particularly on the ground floor. Second floor window panels are generally triple units with 12 lights each; first floor panels are generally triple units with 15 or 18 lights each. Three-light and six-light sections are hinged and operable as awnings or hoppers.

At the north end of the rear elevation is a square smokestack 55'-6" high, corbelled slightly inward about halfway up. Southward from this is an areaway open to the partial basement, a stair tower, and then a large bus entry door. There are two plastic-enclosed steel egress stairs from the second floor. At the south end of the rear elevation is an attached one-story enclosure and large steel exhaust vent rising above the roof. There are miscellaneous other vents, louvers, and attachments at the rear. The monitor roof, about 150 feet long with steel sash windows (most replaced) and various ventilation hoods, is most clearly visible from the rear elevation.

The south elevation is also faced with common red brick. There were originally four window panels in the central shed roof (triple panels of 24 lights each) and one panel in each of the flanking wings (triple panels of 16 lights each). Windows have 2- and 4-light operable panels, hinged as awnings or hoppers. One of the central panels has been converted to a bus entrance. At the west end of the elevation, a one-story brick bus service bay with glass block windows is attached to the original side wall. This bay is entered from the alley. There are various ventilation louvers symmetrically placed above the window panels and at the gable end of the monitor roof.

The north elevation was originally a party wall, but is now exposed. It appears to be common brick that has been stuccoed and painted white. A window has been added in the second floor toward the rear, and there are various attached pipes and conduits.

Time Line

1862	Washington & Georgetown Railway organized
1888	Rock Creek Railway established Georgetown and Tennallytown Railway of D.C. chartered
1889	Glen Echo Railroad Co. established
1890	Tennallytown and Rockville Railroad Co. established
1891	Pepco organized
1895	Capital Traction Co. formed by an act of Congress; authorized Rock Creek Railway to acquire the assets of the Washington & Georgetown Railway Pepco bought by Oscar Crosby Syndicate headed by Crosby and Oscar Lieb buys Georgetown and Tennallytown Railway
1896	Crosby Lieb Syndicate buys Tennallytown and Rockville Railway
1897	Oil and gasoline buses first appeared, but disappeared in a year
1902	Washington Railway & Electric Co. formed from Washington and Great Falls Electric Railway and Crosby Lieb syndicate properties
1908	Friendship Heights car barn permit issued
1909	Second failed attempt to introduce oil and gasoline powered buses
1921	Washington Rapid Transit Company, independent bus company established
1920s	Bus service perceived as solution to city's traffic problems
1933	Capital Transit Company formed. Combined all the street railways, including Capital Traction Co. and Washington Railway & Electric Co., and Washington Rapid Transit under one management.
1934	Western Bus Garage permit issued
1935	Five major lines of Capital Transit (not including Wisconsin Avenue route to Friendship Heights) replaced by bus service
1955	5 week transit strike

- 1956 Congress passed law permitting D.C. Commissioners to settle strike. Revoked current franchise as of 8/15/1956, and required that new operator provide an all bus system. New company was D.C. Transit.
- 1956-1962 Remaining streetcars phased out
- 1962 Last streetcar trip on January 28.
- 1963 Congress approves rapid transit plan
- 1966 WMATA formed to operate D.C.'s bus and subway system. Assets and operation of D.C. Transit and private bus company taken over by new transit authority

Bibliography

- King, LeRoy O., Jr. *100 Years of Capital Traction: The Story of Streetcars in the Nation's Capital*. Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1972.
- E.H.T.Traceries, Inc., *Historic Streetcar and Bus Resources of Washington, DC: 1862-1962*, Multi-property Application, Washington, DC, 1998
-, Application for Historic Landmark for Navy Yard Car Barn, 2000
-, Application for Historic Landmark for Capital Traction Car Barn, 2000

Other Sources

Vertical Files: Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Public Library
 American Institute of Architects
 D.C. Historic Preservation Office

Prints & Drawings Collection: Library of Congress
 Website: Library of Congress

Supplementary Material

Photographs
 Permit # 176107 issued 11/21/1934
 Maps: Sanborn p. 828 (112-321) 1990
 Baist, Vol. 3, p. 15. 1894
 Baist, Vol.3, p. 31, 1911



Western Bus Garage
 West facade 44th St NW
 from left (north) to right (south)
 # 1-5

1



2

Western Bus Garage
West facade - 4401 St. NW



3

Western Bus Garage
west facade - 44th Street NW



4



S#

Western Bus Garage
West facade - 44m Street NW



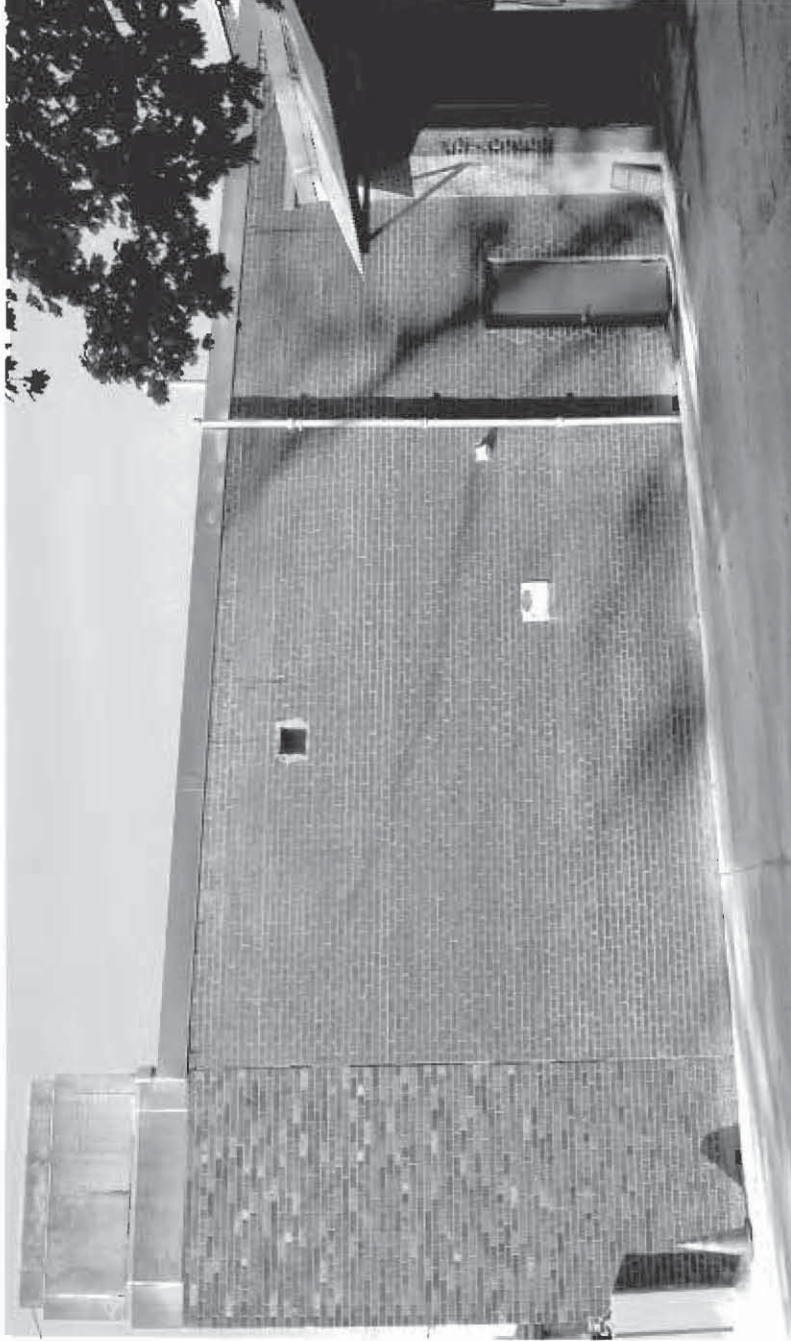
Western Bus Garage
North facade



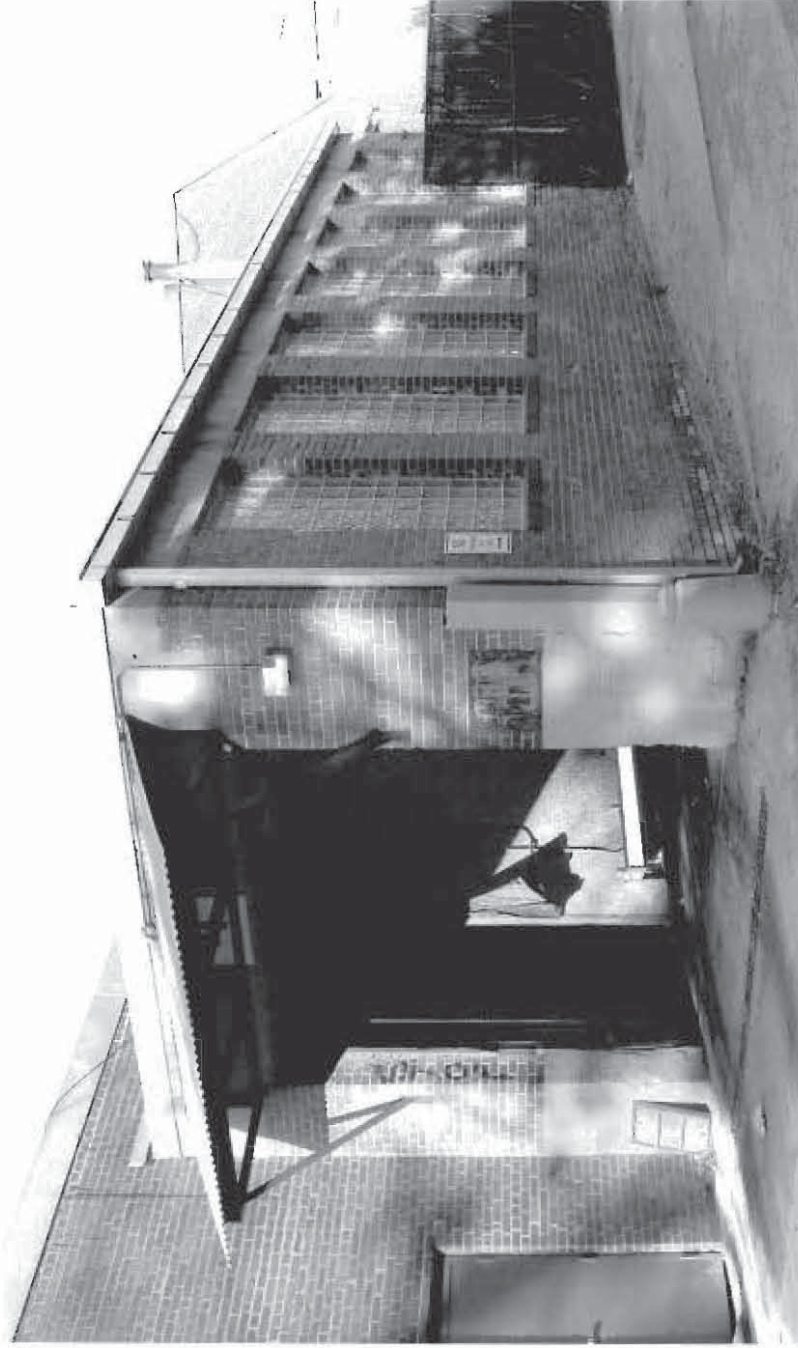
*Western Bus Garage
East facade*



Western Bio Garage
South facade - west end



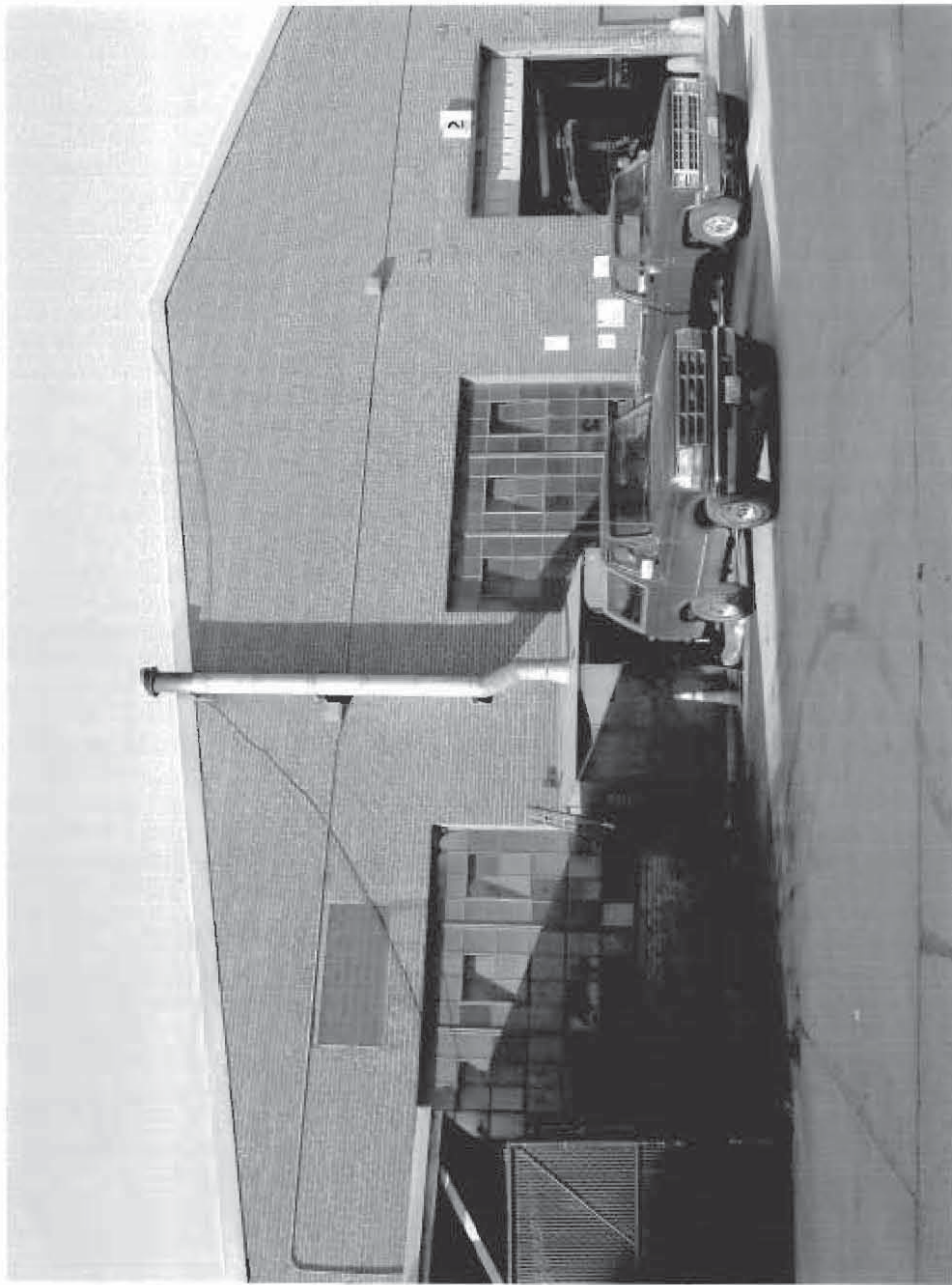
Western Bus Garage
South facade - Service bay from Western end



Western Bus Garage
South facade - service bay from South



Western Bus Page
Sutton facade - partial



Western Bus Garage
South facade - east end

